

The Word Made Flesh

A Sermon by Rev. Eric H. Carswell

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory” (John 1:14).

The Lord loves each of us and wants us to be as happy as we can be to eternity. He loves us. He has loved every human being who has lived in the past. He loves all the people who have yet to be born. Love that is genuine has three qualities. We read in the Writings of the New Church: "It is the essence of Love to love others outside of one self, to desire to be one with them, and to render them blessed from oneself." (True Christian Religion 43)

God has this love in perfection at the very core of who He is. He loves us so much that we're told that no matter what we have done, He cannot even look at us with a stern countenance. (True Christian Religion 56e) There is a part of human nature that cannot possibly believe that this is the case. Since it isn't the way we react to people when they've been destructive or just frustrating, it doesn't make sense to us that the Lord would have such a different reaction. The only way we can easily imagine this perspective, before we've grown spiritually to feel something of it ourselves, is to picture God as being like a foolishly doting parent who will overlook or not recognize any fault, forgive any transgression, and give in eventually to any request. Such a parent is viewed by a child as a pushover and the child will hold him or her in very low respect. A child who is unfortunate to grow up with parenting like this will face a huge number of unnecessary problems as he or she gets older. The child will tend to become adept at being manipulative. He or she will tend to have trouble recognizing that one's own needs and wants need to be balanced or tempered by those of people around oneself. If the child runs into an adult who does present obstacles or boundaries to the child's wishes, that child can be furious or hurt by this intrusion. To the extent that the child continues to believe that the foolish parent's responses are the ways things are supposed to be, he or she will be a danger to self and others.

The Lord loves us perfectly and this love is expressed through perfect wisdom. Wisdom is what gives form to love. A woman can

have a deep desire to bake a delicious meal for a friend, but if she is too ignorant, too inexperienced in the kitchen she may instead produce food that is nearly inedible. Desire or love by itself is blind. The woman needs to know how to cook and what to cook if she wants to achieve her goal of a delicious meal for a friend. When she succeeds, at the core of her efforts will be her love, and this will be guided each step of the way by an understanding of how to reach the goal she seeks.

The opening sentences of the Gospel of John describe the relationship of love and wisdom within the Lord, the infinite God from eternity, the creator and sustainer of all life. These sentences use the term "the Word." It is a translation of the original Greek, *logos*. It means the word by which inner thought is expressed or the inner thought and reason itself. The Logos spoken of in the Gospel of John is the infinite wisdom that gives form to the Divine Love. It is both one with this love and can be thought of as a separate quality. All of creation, whose goal is an expression of Divine love was guided by this Logos or perfect wisdom.

So we read in the opening of this gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." (John 1:1-3)

The goal of creation was and is the fulfillment of the Divine love. The first quality of which is that true love must have another or others outside of self to love. Concerning this quality of the Lord we are told: The first essential, which is to love others outside of one's self, is recognized in God's love for the whole human race; and for its sake God loves all things that He has created because they are means; for when the end is loved the means also are loved. All human beings and things in the universe are outside of God, because they are finite and God is infinite. The love of God goes forth and extends not only to good people and good things, but also to evil people and evil things; consequently not only to the people and things in heaven but also in hell, thus not only to Michael and Gabriel but also to the devil and satan; for God is everywhere, and is from eternity to eternity the same. He says also that "He makes the sun to rise on the good and

on the evil, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matthew 5:45)

But the reason why evil people continue to be evil, and evil things continue to be evil, lies in the subjects and objects themselves, in that they do not receive the love of God as it is, and as it is in mostly in them, but as they themselves are; in the same way as thorns and thistles receive the heat of the sun and the rain of heaven. (True Christian Religion 43)

Each of us is a focus of the Lord's love. He has created us with the goal and intention of serving us and bringing us joy. When we think of the billions of human beings alive today in this world, it is almost impossible to envision that the Lord views each of us as individuals. We look at a forest of trees and can say I love every one of the leaves in this forest, but we are speaking abstractly. But the Lord is very different. He is our loving heavenly Father. Just as an attentive parent sees each of his children as wonderfully unique individuals, beloved each in their own right, needing a special kind of parenting and guidance, experiencing his or her own joys and challenges, so the Lord loves each of us as individuals. In fact, He knows infinitely more about each of us than the most attentive parent could ever know about a child. It is His joy to share in our lives.

But just having created "others" in existence isn't enough to fulfill true Love. The second quality of this love is described with these words:

The second essential of the love of God, which is a desire to be one with others, is recognized in His conjunction with the angelic heaven, with the church on earth, with every one there, and with every thing good and true that enters into and constitutes each person and the church. Moreover, love viewed in itself is nothing but an endeavor towards conjunction; therefore that this aim of the essence of love might be realized each and every human being was created by God into His own image and likeness, with which a conjunction is possible. That the Divine love continually seeks conjunction is evident from the Lord's own words: That He wishes them to be one, He in them and they in Him, and that the love of God might be in them. (John 17:21-23, 26 and True Christian Religion 43)

"Love viewed in itself is nothing but an endeavor towards conjunction." What do these words mean? Specifically, what does "conjunction" mean? It is a desire to share in common goals and common understandings. It is a desire for a deep relationship of trust and mutual goodwill. Conjunction or a deep relationship of love is impossible without freedom to choose that relationship. Imagine the child of very wealthy parents who feels lonely and is told, "Don't worry, we'll pay someone to be your friend." Or consider the boss who suspects that the only reason an employee is so solicitous of his ideas and welfare is the fear of being fired if they expressed their real opinion. What kind of relationships would these be? Would they be anything more than very superficial? Would there be anything more than a temporary "oneness of purpose" so long as there was payment or continuing fear of consequences for not going along. There could be no real love or real conjunction in these cases. So likewise, it is essential to the Lord that we be free to choose to love what He loves, to accept His wisdom, or to reject them both. We can choose to be with Him or choose to distance ourselves from His life.

But for us to choose a relationship of love with the Lord we have to know of Him, His goals, and His thoughts. Otherwise we would not know what we were choosing and not choosing. For this reason, the Lord has made sure that everyone has the essential knowledge of His qualities. Concerning this we read the following from the book the Divine Providence, "Everyone acknowledges God and is conjoined to Him according to the good of his life. All can have a knowledge of God who know anything from religion....The general principles of all religions by which everyone can be saved are: To acknowledge God; and to refrain from doing evil because it is against God. These are the two things which make religion to be religion. If one of them is wanting it cannot be called religion, since to acknowledge God and to do evil is a contradiction; so also is to do good and yet not acknowledge God, for one is not possible without the other. It has been provided by the Lord that almost everywhere there should be some form of religion, and that in every religion there should be these two principles; and it has also been provided by the Lord that everyone who acknowledges God and refrains from doing evil because it is against God should have a place in heaven." (Divine Providence 326:6,9)

The Lord has worked to make sure that the essential knowledge for salvation has been available to all people. But He also wants more than just the essential. He has provided that there be specific revelation to form a church of human beings that could know Him more clearly and worship Him as He truly is. For this reason the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Writings of the New Church have been revealed. By itself written revelation describing what we are to do would not have been enough. It was essential that the Lord, the infinite God and Creator, be born into this world and make His essential Humanity visible and knowable to us. Mere words would not have done it. And so we read in the Gospel of John: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory." (John 1:14) The Advent of the otherwise invisible and unknowable Infinite Creator into this world is the event that we will celebrate on December 25th. Christmas is the celebration of the Lord's birth into this world as a human being who we can see in our mind's eye. We can read of how He taught, healed, lived, allowed Himself to be put to death, and rose as our Savior and Redeemer. Without this clear example we would not be able to freely follow Him and freely love Him. He would be too distant and unknowable to us.

The final fulfillment of true love is shown in its third quality. The third essential of the love of God, which is to render others blessed from Himself, is recognized in eternal life, which is the endless blessedness, happiness, and joy that God gives to those who receive into themselves His love. For as God is love itself, so is He blessedness itself; for all love breathes forth delight from itself, and the Divine love breathes forth blessedness itself, happiness, and joy to eternity. Thus God from Himself renders the angels blessed, and people after death; and this He does by conjunction with them. (True Christian Religion 43)

If we are to receive these blessings of happiness and peace, we must be joined in a deep relationship of love with the Lord. We must freely choose to turn to His Word, learn what it teaches, and consciously compel ourselves to think, speak, and live better than we naturally incline to. We must turn to the Lord in prayer asking for His help and guidance. Gradually He will help us to recognize His love and His order more and more clearly. Gradually He will help us to think and will more and more as He does. Gradually He will bring us

into a oneness with Him. If we cooperate with the Lord He will conjoin us in heart, mind, and life with Him and from this conjunction comes true happiness for us and for Him. This is the most wonderful gift anyone could ever receive.

Amen.

Lessons: Isaiah 40:9-11, John 1:1-5, 14, 13:15, True Christian Religion 339:1-2